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ALEXANDER AND THE MONGOLS¹

By †JOHN ANDREW BOYLE

The association of Alexander the Great with the Mongols begins with the identification of the latter with the peoples of Gog and Magog. The evolution of this legend, which has its origin in the Book of Genesis, is curious in the extreme.² In Genesis³ Magog is mentioned as one of the sons of Japhet, his name occurring between those of Gomer and Madai. Since Madai is clearly intended as the eponym of the Medes and Gomer has been located in Cappadocia and Phrygia it has been plausibly suggested that Magog at this stage corresponded to the territory in between, i.e. the region immediately south of the Caucasus in Eastern and Northern Armenia. In Ezekiel⁴ we hear for the first time of Gog "of the land of Magog", who will come from his place out of the uttermost parts of the north, he and many peoples with him, "all of them riding on horses, a great company and a mighty army." It will be seen that the "land of Magog" can no longer be located south of the Caucasus, and indeed Ezekiel's prophecy of the invasion of Gog has been interpreted as an echo of the invasions of the Cimmerians, who came southwards from the steppes through the Darial pass towards the end of the eighth century B.C.; or more probably of the invasion of the Scythians which took place in the following century by way of Darband. Finally we are told in Revelation⁵ that "when the thousand years are finished, Satan shall be loosed out of his prison, and shall come forth to deceive the nations which are in the four corners of the earth, Gog and Magog, to gather them together to the war; the number of whom is as the sand of the sea".

The legend of the enclosing of these peoples behind a wall of brass and iron from which they will break out at the end of the world has been traced back to two passages in Josephus, in one⁶ of which he equates the Scythians with Gog and Magog while in the other⁷ he speaks of a pass, apparently in the Caucasus area,⁸ which Alexander had shut up with iron gates. Of the legend itself there appear to have been two main versions: that in Pseudo-Methodius, from which it passed into Western recensions of the Alexander Romance: and that in the *Christian Legend concerning Alexander*,⁹ which was incorporated into the lost Arabic version of the Romance and which is preserved in its derivatives, with particular fidelity in the Ethiopic version. To Pseudo-Methodius we shall return. In the *Christian Legend concerning Alexander*, an apocalyptic work composed by an unknown author or authors in northern Mesopotamia at some time between A.D. 629 and 636, the story of the enclosing of the peoples of Gog and Magog (identified with the Huns) runs – somewhat abridged – as follows. After his journey to the Land of the Rising Sun (of which more anon) Alexander travels northwards through Armenia into the southern Caucasus. He asks the natives: "Who are the nations within this mountain upon which we are looking?" They

reply that they are the Huns and that their kings are "Gog and Magog and Nawal the kings of the sons of Japhet . . .". And upon hearing their description of these savage and cruel peoples and their repellent customs, he orders a great gate of brass and iron to be constructed to close the gap in the wall of mountains and confine the nations of Gog and Magog within them. Upon the gate he causes an inscription to be engraved in which he prophesies the future incursions of the Huns, one of which was to take place "at the conclusion of eight hundred and twenty-six years". The year of this invasion, according to the Era of Alexander, would be that commencing on 1 October 514, and that year, in which there was an invasion of the Caucasus region by the Hunnish people known as the Sabir,¹⁰ was taken by Nöldeke¹¹ to be the *terminus a quo* of the *Legend*. He therefore regarded the second incursion of the Huns, prophesied to take place "at the conclusion of nine hundred and forty years", i.e. in A.D. 629, as a genuine prophecy and consequently a "Phantasiegebilde". However Czeglédy¹² has pointed out that we have in the Armenian historian Movṣēs Daxurancī¹³ a detailed account of a large-scale Khazar invasion in that very year. As he says: "There can be no doubt that this was again a case of a *vaticinatio ex eventu*". And he concludes "that the *Legend*, in its present form, originated after 629, yet at a time preceding the victory of the Arabs in Mesopotamia, that is the year 636".

Having been identified with the Scythians, the Alans and the Huns, and in fact with every successive invader from the North and North-East, Gog and Magog were in the thirteenth century, as was both logical and predictable, identified with the Mongols; but with this complication that Gog and Magog had by now been equated or confused with the Lost Tribes of Israel, who, according to the *Historica scholastica* of the twelfth-century writer Petrus Comester,¹⁴ had been enclosed by Alexander as a punishment for their apostasy, and the Mongols in consequence became the descendants of the Jewish tribes traditionally deported to Media by Shalmaneser, king of Assyria. The Jews themselves, according to an incredible story related by Matthew Paris,¹⁵ believed "that these Tartars and Cumanians were a portion of their race, whom God had, at the prayers of Alexander the Great, shut up in the Caspian mountains". Accordingly great numbers of the Continental Jews, especially those belonging to the Empire, met in a secret rendezvous, where they were harangued as follows by one of their number:

"My brothers, seed of the illustrious Abraham, vineyard of the Lord of Sabaoth, whom our God . . . has permitted to be so long oppressed under Christian rule, now the time has arrived for us to liberate ourselves, and by the judgement of God to oppress them in our turn, that the remnant of Israel may be saved. For our brethren of the tribes of Israel, who were formerly shut up, have gone forth to bring the whole world to subjection to them and to us. And the more severe and more lasting that our former suffering has been, the greater will be the glory that will ensue to us."

Matthew continues:

"The whole assembly heard this speech with pleasure, and at once bought all the swords, daggers, and armour, they could find for sale anywhere, and, in order to conceal their treachery, securely stowed them away in casks. They then openly told the Christian chiefs, under whose dominion they were, that these people, commonly called Tartars, were Jews, and would not drink wine unless made by Jews, and of this they have informed us, and with great earnestness have begged to be supplied with some wine made by us, their brethren. We, however, desiring to remove from among us these our inhuman public enemies, and to release you Christians from their impending tyrannical devastation, have prepared about thirty casks full of deadly intoxicating wine, to be carried to them as soon as possible. The Christians therefore permitted these wicked Jews to make this wicked present to their wicked enemies. When, however, the said Jews had reached a distant part of Germany, and were about to cross a certain bridge with their casks, the master of the bridge, according to custom, demanded payment of the toll for their passage; the Jews, however, replied insolently, refusing to satisfy his demands, saying that they were employed in this business for the advantage of the empire, indeed of all Christendom, having been sent to the Tartars, secretly to poison them with their wines. The keeper of the bridge, however, doubting the assertion of these Jews, bored a hole through one of the casks; but no liquor flowed therefrom; and becoming certain of their treachery, he took off the hoops of the cask, and, breaking it open, discovered that it was full of arms. At this sight he cried out, "Oh, unheard-of-treachery, why do we allow such people to live amongst us?" And at once he and others, whom his astonishment had collected round him, broke open all the other casks, which, as soon as they had done, they found them also filled with Cologne swords and daggers, without hilts, closely and compactly stowed away; they then at once openly showed forth the hidden treachery and extraordinary deceit of the Jews, who chose rather to assist these open enemies of the world in general, who, they said, were very much in need of arms, than to aid the Christians, who allowed them to live amongst them and communicate with them in the way of traffic. They were therefore at once handed over to the executioners, to be either consigned to perpetual imprisonment, or to be slain with their own swords."

Ricoldo da Monte Croce, a Dominican missionary who was in contact with the Mongols in Baghdad in the last decades of the thirteenth century, has an interesting passage¹⁶ in which he speculates on their origins. Many, he says, think they are the Lost Tribes of Israel, seven of which were captured by Tiglath Peleser, king of Assur, and placed by the river of Gozan beyond the mountains of the Medes, which many say are the Caspian Mountains.¹⁷ So long as the monarchy of the Chaldees and Assyrians and the Medes and Persians endured they were unable to come out, being restrained by public edict. And when the

monarchy was transferred to the Greeks, Alexander himself miraculously closed the mountains and barred their egress. Josephus and Methodius¹⁸ say, however, that they will come out at the end of the world and carry out a great slaughter of mankind. Many therefore, believe that they are these very Tartars who have suddenly issued forth from the mountains and begun to destroy the world in the eastern parts. In support of this belief they adduced two arguments. First, the Tartars have a great hatred of Alexander and cannot endure to hear his name mentioned. Secondly, their script is very similar to that of the Chaldees, which in turn is very similar to that of the Jews.¹⁹ On the other hand, they appear to have no knowledge of Jewish traditions and in appearance and manners differ not only from the Jews but from all other nations. They themselves say they are descended from Gog and Magog. Therefore they call themselves Magoli; a corruption of Magogoli.²⁰ Methodius, however, says that along with the captive Jews²¹ Alexander enclosed Gog and Magog, a most filthy people, and many others, and that they will issue forth at the end of time and carry out a great slaughter of mankind. And Ricoldo concludes with the words: "Solucionem relinquo", unable to decide whether this hitherto unknown people were the descendants of the Lost Tribes or of Gog and Magog, which latter peoples, unlike many of his contemporaries, he does not confound with the captive Jews.

That the Mongols – or some of them – believed, as Ricoldo asserts, that they were descended from Gog and Magog is by no means impossible. We know that Nestorian missionaries were active in Eastern Asia already in the 7th century and there is reason to believe that they brought with them not only the Bible but also the *Christian Legend concerning Alexander*, and the *Revelations* of Methodius, both of them Nestorian compositions.²² In a Mongol legend preserved in the pages of Rashīd al-Dīn,²³ we are told how the Mongol peoples after being imprisoned for centuries in a valley hemmed in on all sides by lofty mountains and impenetrable forests, finally effected their escape in the following manner. Gathering great quantities of wood and charcoal they placed them at the foot of a bluff where an iron mine was situated. They then slaughtered seventy head of oxen and horses and fashioned seventy pairs of bellows out of their hides. Having set fire to the wood and charcoal they blew all seventy pairs of bellows simultaneously, and the fierce heat caused the iron ore to melt and so formed an outlet through which they made their way down to the plains below. Now in the Ethiopic version of the *Alexander Romance*,²⁴ which is, as has been mentioned, upon the whole a very faithful rendering of its lost Arabic original, we read how Alexander's craftsmen, when constructing the Gate, "took the skins of great animals and made them into bellows wherewith to blow the fire, and they melted brass and iron together, and one metal mingled with the other, just as when a man kneadeth clay". The bellows are mentioned too in the Qur'anic version of the story;²⁵ and we can assume, therefore, that great bellows fashioned from the hides of animals must have figured in the original text of the *Christian Legend*.

In the Mongol legend we have the reverse of the picture: Gog and Magog breaking out of their mountain prison by use of the same techniques with which Alexander had closed them in, though Gog and Magog and Alexander have now been forgotten and the Gate of iron and brass has been transformed into an iron mine.

A still stranger metamorphosis has taken place in the version of the legend recorded by the Armenian monk Hayton in his *Flor des estoires de la terre d'Orient*.²⁶ Here the Ergene Qun legend (so called after the name of the valley in which the Mongols were imprisoned) has been fused with the story of Baljuna, the river or lake to which Genghis Khan withdrew after his indecisive battle with, or perhaps defeat by, Ong Khan, the ruler of the Kercit, whom Marco Polo identified with Prester John.²⁷ The original home of the Mongols lay to the east of a great mountain called Belgian (an obvious corruption of Baljuna); from the western slopes of the mountain there extended the waters of a great sea which blocked all egress in that direction. Following the instructions he had received in a vision Genghis Khan at the head of his army advanced to the edge of the water, where, dismounting from their horses, he and his men knelt nine²⁸ times facing the East and engaged in prayer throughout the night. In the morning they found that the sea had receded from the mountain by a distance of nine feet leaving a pathway along which they advanced westwards to conquer the world.

Ricoldo's version of the legend²⁹ is different again. The Tartars lived the lives of shepherds and hunters beyond the mountains to which Boethius³⁰ seems to refer when he says that the fame of the Romans had not yet reached them. These mountains were impassable except in one place where there was a great fortress with apparently no one inside it. However, when people approached it they would hear what appeared to be the sound of men and horses, and above all the braying of trumpets, and would flee in terror. The noise was in fact produced by the wind, but this was not realized until one day a hunter was in pursuit of a hare, which disappeared into the building. While he hesitated to follow it inside an owl settled upon the gate and uttered its cry. The hunter said to himself "This is no human habitation where the hare seeks shelter and the owl sings its song". And entering the fortress he discovered the true state of affairs, which he reported to his fellows offering his services as their guide through the pass. Ricoldo's seems to be the oldest recorded version of this story; in a later version³¹ the trumpets blown by the wind are said to have been set up by Alexander to give Gog and Magog the impression that he was still guarding the exits from the Caucasus; and one wonders whether we have not here the original form of the legend, perhaps recorded in some forgotten recension of the Alexander Romance or the *Christian Legend*.

However, Alexander's enclosing of the peoples of Gog and Magog is not the only episode in the *Christian Legend* that had reached the Mongols and become incorporated in their folklore. Before his encounter with these peoples Alexander had, according to the *Legend*, journeyed eastwards "to the place where the sun

enters the window of heaven The place of his rising is over the sea, and the people who dwell there, when he is about to rise, flee away and hide themselves in the sea, that they may not be burnt by his rays; and he passes through the midst of the heaven to the place where he enters the window of heaven; and wherever he passes there are terrible mountains and those who dwell there have caves hollowed out in the rocks, and as soon as they see the sun passing (over them), men and birds flee away from him and hide in the caves, for rocks are rent by his blazing heat and fall down, and whether they be men or beasts, as soon as the stones touch them they are consumed".³² The story of the land of the rising sun and its troglodyte inhabitants is recounted very briefly in the Qur'ān:³³ "Then followed he [i.e. Dhu'l-Qarnain, Alexander] a route, until when he reached the rising of the sun he found it to rise on a people to whom he had given no shelter from it . . .". The story is told in much greater detail in an Oghuz Turkish legend about the origin of the rain-stone preserved in the pages of the thirteenth-century geographer Yāqūt.³⁴ Finally it has found its way into the popular traditions recounted by John de Plano Carpini, the ambassador of Innocent IV to the Mongols, the Land of the Rising Sun being one of the countries invaded by Genghis Khan.³⁵ In the fuller version of the narrative edited by George D. Painter and contained in the same volume as the so-called Vinland Map³⁶ the country is given a Mongol name: "Narayrgen, that is, Men of the Sun, for Nara is Tartar for sun and Irgen means men". The name is interesting for two reasons: it indicates that Carpini and his companions obtained the story from Mongol (and not Russian or Turkish) informants and it points to an ultimate source additional to the *Christian Legend*. This is an apocalyptic work known as the *Revelations* of Methodius, being ascribed in the manuscripts to St. Methodius, bishop of Patara, who was martyred in the early fourth century. It seems in fact to have been composed in Syria and in the Syriac language³⁷ at some time between 670 and 686.³⁸ Translated into Latin in Merovingian times it enjoyed an immense vogue in Europe throughout the Middle Ages and down into modern times. In this work we are told how Ionitus, a son of Noah born 100 years after the Flood, was sent by his father to the East and penetrated as far as the sea called "*hiliu chora*",³⁹ that is the region of the sun (*regio solis*) in which the sun rises",⁴⁰ and how Alexander also came to the *regio solis*, whose inhabitants, the descendants of Japhet, he perceived to be unclean people of horrible appearance; and driving them to the north he enclosed them within his wall of brass and iron, identifying them in effect with the people of Gog and Magog.⁴¹ There can, I think, be little doubt that the country of Narayrgen, the Men (or rather the People) of the Sun, is to be identified with the *regio solis* of Pseudo-Methodius; nor is there any difficulty in assuming that the *Revelations*, like the *Christian Legend concerning Alexander*, carried eastwards by Nestorian missionaries, passed, no doubt through Turkish intermediaries, into the popular traditions of the Mongols.

It is a curious fact that the pagan *Alexander Romance* seems to have reached

Eastern Asia at a later stage than these Christian works. Indeed not until Alexander, through his appearance in the Qur'an as Dhu'l-Qarnain, achieved the status of a proto-Muslim. In the Oriental versions of the Romance, i.e. the Syriac translation, the lost Arabic version of it and the numerous Muslim derivatives of the latter there is an account of a journey made by Alexander across Central Asia to China.⁴² To reach China he must of necessity have passed through the country of the Turks and in fact in the eleventh-century Turkish-Arabic lexicon of Kāshgharī we find a number of references to Alexander's (Dhu'l-Qarnain's) adventures amongst the Turks.⁴³ These are mainly aetiological tales explaining the names of Turkish tribes and we may reasonably suppose that they were part and parcel of a Turkish version of the Romance, written or oral or both, current in Central Asia. Motifs from such a version will then have found their way into the popular literature of both Turks and Mongols. A curious example occurs in Carpini's account of the Mongol conquests. I quote from the fuller version in the *Tartar relation*.⁴⁴ A Mongol army led by Genghis Khan's second son, i.e. presumably Ögedei, having conquered Lesser India or Ethiopia, proceeded against Greater India, the king of which country, "who is always called Prester John . . . immediately sent an army against them which used a new and unheard-of device against the Tartars. They organized a special force of three thousand warriors carrying on the front of their saddles statues of iron or bronze containing live fire in their hollow interior, and before the Tartars' arrows could reach them they began to shoot fire against them, by blowing it with bellows which they carried on either side of the saddle under both thighs. After the fire they began to shoot arrows and in this way the Tartar army was put in disorder". Two totally disparate elements are combined in this story. The Indians employ against the Mongols the device which Alexander in the Romance employed against Porus's elephants:⁴⁵

"He ordered that all the bronze statues of men that he possessed be intensely heated until the bronze was like fire, and he had them taken up front against the beasts. And when the animals attacked them and laid hold of the bronze of the statues, which looked like men, their mouths were burnt and broken. Never again did they approach anyone. With such ingenuity, astute Alexander put a stop to the attack of the animals".

At the same time there is a reference to the Mongol custom of tying dummy figures on their spare mounts in order to increase their apparent numbers,⁴⁶ and perhaps to the actual employment of this stratagem at the Battle of Parvān.⁴⁷

The motif of the red-hot statues does not occur in the Mongolian version of the Alexander Romance, which indeed omits the whole episode of the war with Porus. This fragmentary text occurs in a badly damaged manuscript brought back by Albert von Le Coq from the first Turfan expedition and preserved in the Academy of Sciences in East Berlin. It has been edited and translated by two eminent scholars, Nicholas Poppe⁴⁸ and Francis W. Cleaves.⁴⁹ This brief work –

it occupies seven of the seventeen folios of what has been described as "the very delicate remains of a book"⁵⁰ — consists of four episodes: (i) the ascent by Sulqarnai (Dhu'l-Qarnain-Alexander) of Mount Sumur, (ii) his descent to the bottom of the sea, (iii) his descent into the Land of Darkness, and (iv) his retreat to the city of Misir. These episodes are summarized by Professor Cleaves⁵¹ in the introduction to his edition and translation of the text in the following terms.

"In ancient times, in the land of Qurasan (X(u)rāsān), in the city named Misir (Miṣr), there lived a man named Sulqarnai (Dū'l-qarnain). Someone, it appears, says something about living for two — possibly three — thousand years and tells Sulqarnai that he is favored by Heaven. Sulqarnai, thereupon, assembles his *noyad* ("officers"), and reports to them what he has heard, stating, it seems, that he wishes to live three thousand years. He sets forth and reaches a great land in which he crosses a bridge with fifty good *Nöked* ("companions"), but he alone ascends upon Mount Sumur (Sumeru) whence he surveys the whole world. On the Mount there is a strap, by which, tying it to himself, Sulqarnai descends to make an inquiry of one of his *nöked*. The *garudi* (*garuḍa*) bird, upon seeing him descending, tells him that he is foolish, and makes still other observations which seem to dissuade him from his quest of immortality on Mount Sumur.

Of the second episode, the descent to the bottom of the sea, more can be related, because the text becomes increasingly complete: Upon hearing from Sulqarnai that he intends to descend to the bottom of the sea, his *noyad* try to dissuade him, warning him of the innumerable, terrible creatures there to be encountered, but, in the face of his determination to make the descent, they express the wish that he escape all harm. Sulqarnai has built a *qaraba* big enough to accommodate two persons. Furthermore, he has nets placed outside the *qaraba* and has innumerable ropes twisted — long enough to stretch a distance of 5,000 *mod*. Within the *qaraba* he loads food and provisions and, tying a stone firmly to the *qaraba*, goes into the sea. At some point — it is not clear where, but presumably, the bottom of the sea — someone engages him in a conversation, in the course of which he has occasion to refer to his ascent upon Mount Sumur. Upon being urged to return swiftly, he makes the ascent back to the surface of the sea in one moon and relates to his *noyad* all that he has seen within the sea.

With the beginning of the third episode, the text is complete for several lines: Sulqarnai now informs his *nöked*, and *noyad*, that he will set with Mother Sun and descend to the land of darkness. As they discuss this new adventure which he proposes, he commands them to follow. Setting with the sun, they reach the entrance of darkness and, upon entering, encounter someone who says something to Sulqarnai which, because of the *lacunae* in the text, is but partially comprehensible. Sulqarnai, after a word to his *nöked*, turns back from the land of darkness. As he draws near to the entrance of darkness, a

person who does not reveal himself gives him a cup full of the water of immortality with the assurance that, after drinking the water, he will live for three thousand years. Then Sulqarnai says something to his *nöked* who reply with a statement of which the essential elements have been lost. Upon going outside, Sulqarnai again speaks to his *nöked*, asking what hinders them from drinking the water and gives it to them. The *nöked*, however, are of two minds – some wishing to drink the water and some being in a quandary, not knowing whether to do so or not. Thereupon, a wise *noyan* tells Sulqarnai that he will weary of immortality and that it will avail him nothing to exist alone in the world. He reminds him that people who follow him will be born no more and concludes his counsel with words to the effect that, if Sulqarnai does not fear that later, regretting to find himself alone on the earth, he might say to himself that if he had not drunk the water, he would not find himself in such a circumstance, then he should drink it. These words of wisdom are heeded by Sulqarnai who pours out the water which falls upon the leaves of the cypress tree which, in consequence, is ever green.

In the fourth and final episode Sulqarnai returns safe and sound to the city of Misir whence he had gone forth in quest of immortality. Assembling his *nöked*, he recounts his experiences and tells them that there has never been born a sovereign who has rejoiced so much as he. Then he makes his testamentary charge: after his death, they are to take him once round the world; to offer a thousand fine maidens; to fill a thousand *natur*⁵² of gold with big pearls, little pearls, and gold; to choose a thousand young and good wrestler-athletes, and zitherists; to send a thousand sons – those who are twenty or thirty years old; to send a thousand white-headed old men; to send some persons – perhaps, soldiers – bearing spears and swords; and to cause his hands to be exposed to view. At that point, there are *lacunae* in the text and the elements essential for a perfect comprehension of what follows are missing. The episode is brought to a close, however, with Sulqarnai's death."

This remarkable little work calls for a much more detailed commentary than it is possible to furnish here. It is undoubtedly, as Cleaves⁵³ suggests and for the reasons which he gives, a translation of an Uighur Turkish text; and the date of its composition is agreed to be in the early years of the fourteenth century.⁵⁴ Its contents are equally interesting for what is old and what is new. Alexander is said to be a native of Khurāsān, which Poppe is loath to take literally and translates by "East",⁵⁵ and yet a Central Asian Mongol or Uighur Turk might well have looked upon Khurāsān as a country of the extreme West in which Misir, i.e. Alexandria, would naturally be situated. Alexander's entry into the Land of Darkness by setting with Mother Sun reminds one of the journey of the Babylonian sun god Shamash as reflected in the *Christian Legend*.⁵⁶ Neither Poppe nor Cleaves comments on the first part of Alexander's testament in which he stipulates that after death he is to be taken once around the world, that a thousand

fine maidens are to be "offered", that a thousand golden receptacles are to be filled with pearls and gold, that a thousand wrestlers and musicians are to be "chosen" and that a thousand young and a thousand old men are to be "sent". This is surely a reference to the human victims and grave goods deposited in the tomb of a Mongol khan,⁵⁷ with whom Alexander is here equated. As for the second stipulation of his will, namely, that his hands are to be exposed to view, i.e. that they are to be left protruding from the coffin so that all may see that he left the world empty-handed, this story does not appear to occur in the *Ā'ina-yi Iskandarī* of Amīr Khusrau, as claimed by Poppe⁵⁸ on the authority of Bertels; it does, however, occur in Nizāmī,⁵⁹ in 'Aṭṭār⁶⁰ and in an eleventh-century *Fürsten-spiegel*, the *Qābus-nāme* of Kai-Kā'ūs b. Iskandar,⁶¹ and may well have once figured in one of the recensions of the *Alexander Romance*.

The references to the Garudi bird and Mount Sumur are extremely interesting. The former is, of course, the Garuḍa of Indian mythology, which figures in Buddhism as a kind of harpy. Here it is a translation of the Greek *phoenix*. We read in the tenth-century Latin translation of the Romance by Archpriest Leo of Naples,⁶² and also in the seventh-century Syriac version,⁶³ of Alexander's coming across a bird sitting on a tree without fruit or leaves and having upon its head something like the rays of the sun: Leo tells us that it is called Fenix, and the anonymous Syrian calls it the "palm bird", *phoenix* in Greek meaning, of course, both "phoenix" and "palm-tree". The episode occurs in none of the Greek texts and is therefore, peculiar to the δ^* tradition.⁶⁴ It does not, however, occur in the Ethiopic version and we have, therefore, the re-appearance of a lost theme after the lapse of many centuries. There is, of course, in this brief text a great deal of conflation. The phoenix appears in Leo and in the Syriac version *before* Alexander ascends the mountain: its reproaching him here as he descends is reminiscent of the warning addressed to him in the β recension⁶⁵ by a bird "of the size of a dove" in a golden cage suspended from the roof of the temple.

To the mountain (as to the phoenix) the Mongolian translator – or rather his Turkish source – gives an Indian name: Sumeru (Meru), the golden mountain at the centre of the Universe, which also occurs in Buddhist myths. The episode is found in both the β and the δ^* recensions.⁶⁶ The details have been greatly altered in the Mongol version. The golden chain of the original has become a hanging strap by which Alexander lets himself down the side of the mountain.⁶⁷ Alexander, in the original, climbs the mountain to enter the temple, in which he finds the sleeping body of the god Dionysus. In the Mongolian version his purpose is as we have seen, to view the whole world from the summit of Meru. But the most interesting episode is without question that of Alexander's descent to the bottom of the sea. In the West, at least, no other episode in the Alexander Romance attracted greater attention, and I would refer you to Professor D. J. A. Ross's inaugural lecture, "Alexander and the Faithless Lady: a submarine adventure",⁶⁸ and in particular to the delightful illustrations from medieval manuscripts. The

story must have reached Europe directly or indirectly from a Greek text;⁶⁹ for it does not occur in Leo. Nor does it occur in the Syriac version; but its occurrence in the Ethiopic version⁷⁰ shows that it does belong to the δ^* recension. The word *qaraba* in Cleaves's text requires explanation. It is, as he was the first to discover,⁷¹ the Persian *qarāba* "carboy"; an apt description of the "immense glass wine-jar" enclosed in an iron cage, in which, according to the Greek text, Alexander was let down into the sea. The lengths of rope to which this primitive diving-bell were attached were capable of reaching a depth of 5,000 *mod*; i.e. some 30,000 kilometres, with which we may contrast the modest 308 cubits of the Greek original.

I have made no comment on what Cleaves⁷² calls the "predominant theme" of the work, i.e. Alexander's quest for immortality. This is a vast subject, the so-called legend of Khadīr or Khidr, who, beginning his career as Alexander's cook (or perhaps as the Greek sea-god Glaucus), evolved over the centuries into a Muslim prophet;⁷³ it would delay us too long to consider it here. The work, as a whole, deserves more attention than it has so far received. The Greek original of the δ^* recension is, as we have remarked, no longer extant, and is represented only by the Latin version of Leo of Naples, the seventh-century Syriac version from which the lost Arabic version was made, and the Ethiopic version derived from that lost Arabic version. Any new version based on this tradition must be of interest to classicists and comparatists concerned with the history of the Alexander Romance. The text of the Mongolian version is, in Cleaves's words,⁷⁴ "to put it mildly, in a deplorable state of preservation", and it may be doubted whether more can be done in the way of decipherment and restoration. Nevertheless, a fresh examination of the mutilated work carried out by a Mongolist in collaboration with an authority on Pseudo-Callisthenes might perhaps yield useful results. But, however significant the work may yet prove, it is, at the very least, documentary proof that the Mongols of the Middle Ages did know of Alexander, if only under his Islamic name of Dhu'l-Qarnain.

NOTES

¹ The revised text of the Sir Gerard Clauson Memorial Lecture delivered before the Royal Asiatic Society on the 11th May, 1978.

² See A. R. Anderson, *Alexander's Gate, Gog and Magog, and the Inclosed Nations*, Cambridge, Mass., 1932, 3-8.

³ X, 2.

⁴ XXXVIII, 1-3.

⁵ XX, 7-8.

⁶ *Antiquities of the Jews*, VI, 1, 1.

⁷ *Wars of the Jews*, VII, 7, 4. On the basis of these two passages Pfister propounded the view "that the legend of Alexander's Gate built to exclude Gog and Magog was of Jewish origin and made in Alexandria in the first century of our era, and that from this Jewish legend ultimately are derived all our versions of Alexander's Gate, even the Syrian *Christian* (prose) *Legend* . . ." See Anderson, *Alexander's Gate*, p. 20, n. 1. Anderson himself disagrees

with this view, holding that while "the elements of the legend . . . are to be found in Josephus . . . there is no indication that these elements have been put together in the time of Josephus, or, if put together, that they had gained general acceptance . . .". K. Czeglédy, "The Syriac legend concerning Alexander the Great", *AOH*, VII, 231–49 (237, n. 20), accepts Anderson's argument, though with some qualifications.

⁸ This has usually been taken to be Darband, most recently by René Grousset, *Histoire de l'Arménie des origines à 1071*, Paris, 1947, 109. Indeed, until the publication of Anderson's article "Alexander at the Caspian Gates", *Transactions and Proceedings of the American Philological Association*, LIX, 1929, 130–63, it was generally accepted that while the Alexander of history was associated only with the Caspian Gates proper, i.e. a defile in the mountains to the south-east of Tehran, the Alexander of the Romance was associated only with the pass of Darband. In this study however, Anderson demonstrates that the legendary Alexander does not appear at Darband until the time of Heraclius and that in the original form of the legend the building of the Gate took place in the pass of Darial in the Central Caucasus between Tiflis and Vladikavkaz.

⁹ For a translation of the Syriac text see E. A. Wallis Budge (ed. and tr.), *The history of Alexander the Great, being the Syriac version of the Pseudo-Callisthenes*, Cambridge, 1889, 144–58.

¹⁰ On the incursions of the Sabir into Armenia and Asia Minor see Arthur Christensen, *L'Iran sous les Sassanides*, Copenhagen, 1936, 348.

¹¹ Theodor Nöldeke, "Beiträge zur Geschichte des Alexanderromans", *Denkschriften der kaiserlichen Akademie der Wissenschaften, Philosophisch-historische Classe XXXVIII*, 1890, Abhandlung, V, 31.

¹² pp. 247–8.

¹³ C. J. F. Dowsett (tr.), *The history of the Caucasian Albanians, by Movsēs Daxsurançi*, London, 1961, 104–6.

¹⁴ On Petrus Comestor see Saralyn R. Daly, "Peter Comestor: Master of Histories", *Speculum*, XXXII, 1957, 62–73.

¹⁵ J. A. Giles (tr.), *Matthew Paris's English history, from the year 1235 to 1273*, London, 1852, I, 357–8.

¹⁶ J. C. M. Laurent, *Peregrinatores Medii Aevi quattuor*, Leipzig, 1873, 119.

¹⁷ Based on Comestor, (quoted by Anderson, *Alexander's Gate*, 64): "... et obsedit [sc. Shalmaneser] Samariam tribus annis, et cepit eam anno novo Osce et sexto Ezechiae, et transtulit Israel in Assyrios," scilicet septem tribus quae remanserant, 'et posuit eos iuxta fluvium Gozan ultra montes Medorum et Persarum'. What liberties have been taken with the text of II Kings, XVII. 5–6 may be seen from a comparison with the version in John Gray, *I and II Kings: a commentary*, second ed., London, 1970, 642: "... and besieged it for three years. In the ninth year of Hoshea the king of Assyria took Samaria and deported Israel to Assyria and settled them in Halah and the Habor region, the river of Gozan, and in the mountains of Media". For a commentary on the passage see Gray, 643–4. The "river of Gozan", transferred by Comestor beyond the Elburz mountains, is in fact the Khabur, a left-bank affluent of the Euphrates. The substitution of Tiglath-pileser for his successor Shalmaneser seems to be due to Ricoldo himself.

¹⁸ Josephus says nothing of the kind, and the peoples enclosed by Alexander according to Pseudo-Methodius do not include the Lost Tribes. See Ernst Sackur, *Sibyllinische Texte und Forschungen*, Halle, 1898, 74–5; Anderson, *Alexander's Gate*, 47–8.

¹⁹ That the Mongol system of writing is derived from the Aramaic script is perfectly correct, and Ricoldo appears to be the first European to have recorded the fact.

²⁰ Gerhard Doerfer, "Der Name der Mongolen bei Rašid ad-Din", *CAJ*, XIV, 1970, 68–77 (74–5) sees in the forms *moghöl* and *mōghāl* in the Persian historians a Persian "Verballhornung" of the native *mongghol/mongghal*.

²¹ In fact, Pseudo-Methodius, as Anderson, *Alexander's Gate*, 67–8, points out, makes no mention of the Lost Tribes.

²² See J. A. Boyle, "The Alexander Legend in Central Asia", *Folklore*, LXXXV, 217–28 (224–5); *idem*, "Naraygen or the People of the Sun" in *Altaica collecta*, Wiesbaden, 1976, 131–6 (132–5).

- ²³ *Sbornik letopisei*, I/i, tr. A. A. Khetagurov, Moscow-Leningrad, 1952, 153–4. See also Boyle, "The Alexander Legend in Central Asia", 222–3.
- ²⁴ E. A. Wallis Budge (tr.), *The Alexander Book in Ethiopia*, London, 1933, 142.
- ²⁵ XVIII, 95.
- ²⁶ *Recueil des historiens des Croisades. Documents Arméniens*, II, Paris, 1906, 115–253 (152–3).
- ²⁷ On Baljuna see Boyle, "The Longer Introduction to the Zīj-i-Īlkhānī of Naṣir-ad-Dīn Ṭūsī", *JSS*, VIII, 1963, 244–54 (250, n. 1).
- ²⁸ Nine was a sacred or mystic number amongst the Altaic peoples. cf. the "nine feet" in the following sentence. See Jean-Paul Roux, "Les chiffres symboliques 7 et 9 chez les Turcs non musulmans", *Revue de l'Histoire des Religions*, CLXVIII, 1965, 29–53.
- ²⁹ Laurent, op. cit., 119.
- ³⁰ *Consolatio philosophiae*, II, 8: "Actate denique Marci Tullii, sicut ipse quodam loco significat, nondum Caucasum montem Romanae rei publicae fama transcenderat . . .".
- ³¹ See Anderson, *Alexander's Gate*, 83–5; Denis Sinor, "La Mort de Batu et les trompettes mues par le vent chez Herberstein", *JA*, 1941–42, 201–8 (206–8).
- ³² Budge, *The history of Alexander the Great*, 148.
- ³³ XVIII, 88–9.
- ³⁴ See Boyle, "Turkish and Mongol shamanism in the Middle Ages", *Folklore*, LXXXIII, 1972, 177–93 (187–8).
- ³⁵ See Christopher Dawson (ed.), *The Mongol Mission*, London, 1955, 24–5.
- ³⁶ R. A. Skelton, Thomas E. Marston, and George D. Painter, *The Vinland map and the Tartar relation*, New Haven, 1965, 64 and 66.
- ³⁷ See Michael Kmoskó, "Das Rätsel des Pseudomethodius", *Byzantion*, VI, 1931, 273–96 (275).
- ³⁸ See Sackur, op. cit., 45–51.
- ³⁹ i.e. ἡλίου χώρα.
- ⁴⁰ Sackur, 63–4.
- ⁴¹ Sackur, 72–5.
- ⁴² See Boyle, "Alexander and the Turks", in W. Heissig and others (ed.), *Tractata Altaica Denis Sinor Sexegenario optime de rebus Altaicis merito dedicata*, Wiesbaden, 1976, 107–17 (107–8); *idem*, "The Alexander Romance in the East and West", *Bulletin of the John Rylands University Library of Manchester*, LX, 1977, 13–27 (16–19).
- ⁴³ See Boyle, "Alexander and the Turks", 109–11.
- ⁴⁴ Skelton, Marston, and Painter, 68.
- ⁴⁵ Albert M. Wolohojian (tr.) *The Romance of Alexander the Great by Pseudo-Callisthenes*, New York, 1969, 119–20.
- ⁴⁶ The practice is referred to briefly by John de Plano Carpini. See Dawson, 36.
- ⁴⁷ See Juvainī, *The history of the World-Conqueror*, tr. J. A. Boyle, Manchester, 1958, II, 406 and n. 40.
- ⁴⁸ "Eine mongolische Fassung der Alexandersage", *ZDMG*, CVII, 1957, 105–29.
- ⁴⁹ "An Early Mongolian Version of the Alexander Romance", *HJAS*, XXII, 1958, 1–99.
- ⁵⁰ Cleaves, 2.
- ⁵¹ pp. 7–9.
- ⁵² As Cleaves remarks, p. 94, n. 405, this unrecorded word appears to designate some sort of receptacle.
- ⁵³ p. 27.
- ⁵⁴ Cleaves, 4; Poppe, 105.
- ⁵⁵ pp. 115, nn. 1 and 125.
- ⁵⁶ Boyle, "Narayrgen", 135.
- ⁵⁷ See Boyle, "The thirteenth-century Mongols' conception of the after-life: the evidence of their funerary practices" in H. R. E. Davidson (ed.), *The journey to the other world*, Cambridge and Ipswich, 1975, 27–41, (28, 31, and 38, n. 7).
- ⁵⁸ p. 124, n. 123. See also Cleaves, 26 and 95–6, n. 428.
- ⁵⁹ *Iqbāl-nāma* ed. Vahīd Dastgirdī, Tehran, 1317/1938, 259.
- ⁶⁰ *Muṣibat-nāma* ed. Nurānī Viṣāl, Tehran, 1338/1959, 94–5.

⁶¹ Reuben Levy (transl.), *A Mirror for Princes, the Qābūs-nāma by Kai Kā'ūs ibn Iskandar*, London, 1951, 136–7.

⁶² Fridrich Pfister (ed.), *Der Alexanderroman des Archipresbyters Leo*, Heidelberg, 1913, 111.

⁶³ Budge, *The history of Alexander the Great*, 101.

⁶⁴ On the δ* recension of the Alexander Romance see Pfister, 19–24; Adolf Ausfeld, *Der griechische Alexanderroman*, Leipzig, 1907, 8 and 17–23; D. J. A. Ross, *Alexander historiatus*, London, 1963, 45–65.

⁶⁵ Helmut van Thiel (ed. and tr.), *Leben und Taten Alexanders von Makedonien*, Darmstadt, 1974, 155.

⁶⁶ Van Thiel, 155; Pfister, 111–12; Budge, *The history of Alexander the Great*, 101–2.

⁶⁷ In the Syriac version the chain was girt around the temple; it was suspended inside it according to the β recension. On the other hand Leo describes it as hanging down from a bank underneath the mountain, which is nearer to the Mongolian version.

⁶⁸ London, 1967.

⁶⁹ It occurs only in the β recension (van Thiel, 111 and 113).

⁷⁰ Budge, *The Alexander Book*, 169–72.

⁷¹ p. 78, n. 160.

⁷² p. 7.

⁷³ See Israel Friedländer, *Die Chadirlegende und der Alexanderroman*, Leipzig, 1913.

⁷⁴ p. 30.